

CORNWALL IS SUED ON A BIAS CHARGE

Zoning Law on Housing
Held to Bar Minorities

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NEWBURGH, N. Y., Aug. 2
—The Suburban Action Institute brought a Federal lawsuit today against the town of Cornwall charging it with using its zoning ordinance to exclude blacks and the poor.

The suit claims that by imposing a "virtual ban" on multi-family housing, by setting high minimum sizes for single-family houses and lots, and by limiting the number of bedrooms, the Orange County town prevents the kind of construction that low- and moderate-income people can afford.

As a result, the suit says, the large black community in the area is forced to remain in crowded, inadequate housing in Newburgh, five miles to the north.

According to the suit, 27 per cent of Newburgh's 26,000 people are black, while blacks account for less than 1 per cent of Cornwall's population of 6,500. The housing density in Newburgh is 2,465 units per square mile; in Cornwall it is 97 units per square mile.

Denison Ray, general counsel of the Suburban Action Institute, said that "these startling discrepancies go to the jugular vein of the discriminatory effects created by the zoning laws of suburban communities."

The nonprofit organization, based in White Plains, describes itself as an "institute for research and action in the suburbs." Last October it was successful in a similar law suit in striking down the zoning ordinance of Madison Township, N. J.

Housing for Poor Sought

Mr. Ray said that the lawsuit against Cornwall was the first in the Southern District of New York challenging suburban zoning as exclusionary.

The suit was brought on behalf of 10 black residents of Newburgh and "all others similarly situated," claiming that Cornwall's zoning ordinance violates their constitutional rights of due process, equal protection, freedom of movement, and other rights granted by Federal civil rights legislation.

The institute asks the Federal court to order Cornwall to repeal its zoning ordinance and replace it with one that allows a "substantial amount" of multifamily housing that poor people can afford, in proportion to their numbers in the region.